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Real-Life Spy Tale

Szabo's Testimony Makes Chilly Story

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WASHINGTON — Nothing in the testimony of Hungarian Communist turncoat Laszlo Szabo revealed here this week in a House subcommittee report was surprising.

But it makes a chilly, real-life spy story.

Szabo, taken by his own words, emerges as a weak man who for 20 years could not say no to a system he claims to have found repugnant. When his countrymen staged the famous revolt of October 1956, Szabo accepted Soviet protection in the Ministry of Interior building in Budapest, within earshot of the gunfire.

The 40-year-old Communist espionage agent defected to the West last Oct. 18 in London, where he was assigned to the Hungarian embassy.

TELLS LIFE STORY

Recently he related to the CIA subcommittee his life story and gave information about the Hungarian Intelligence and Security Service. Szabo was a major with the intelligence organization, commonly known as the AVH, which he served for 18 years.

"I cannot say that I am courageous," Szabo confessed, "but I do believe that I am a sensitive man. I have always aspired to a happy life and to the performance of good purposes."

He described the AVH as a Soviet-dominated intelligence organization whose members sometimes "disappeared . . . without a trace."

The AVH staged anti-American demonstrations, he said, bugged embassies, blackmailed tourists and diplomats and even forged copies of Newsweek magazine to misrepresent the U. S civil rights picture to Asian and African readers.

RIVERS CITED

Rep. L. Mendel Rivers, D-S.C., chairman of the Armed Services Committee, brought Szabo's case to the attention of the House Wednesday.

Szabo's testimony, Rivers said, revealed that "every effort is made to blackmail Americans, to threaten people of other Western nations into serving as intelligence agents of the Hungarians."

Szabo said his training was to "use blackmail if you have to, but recruit your man."

His Soviet teachers, he said, "gave examples of blackmailing diplomats with photographs of their intimate relations with women with homosexuals."

SABOTAGE OFFICER

Szabo worked intercepting western agents' radio transmission and as an industrial sabotage officer.

When he defected, he was an espionage officer in London. During the 1956 Hungarian revolt, Szabo "followed orders and kept quiet."

The AVH has had some success, he said, recruiting as agents some of the "Hungarian freedom fighters" who found refuge in this country.

Szabo said he had "his first grave doubts about the morality of the Hungarian security service system," as early as 1948, but continued as an agent. He got out of the service in 1952, but returned in 1954.

FELT SAFER

"I felt I was probably safer in the AVH," he said. ". . . I could have refused to go back, but I feared to do it."

Szabo said he sympathized with the 1956 revolt and told the subcommittee it was accomplished without outside help. He said the Soviets feared to act at first, not wanting to trigger a war, and fully expecting the West to help the revolution. He said he thinks the Russians organized the new government under Kadar, then ordered the new government to ask for help.

"It was all set up like a play," he testified.

Of his long years in the AVH, Szabo said, "I was a member of a very cruel and inhuman organization, but I never did anything criminal . . . A heroic man could have refused, I was not and am not that, and I feared to do it."

Szabo's story leaves untold the status of friends and relatives left behind. In a touching but somehow puzzling appeal to them, he urges that they "assist the long-suffering Hungarian nation by choosing freedom and happiness."